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ABSTRACT

University Child Care at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst uses written policies, a personal safety curriculum, and parent-teacher dialogues to prevent child sexual abuse. This paper discusses aspects of these three components. Discussion of written policies focuses on the mandated reporter status of caregivers, state laws, procedures for reporting abuse, and daily classroom procedures. Aspects of the personal safety component include anatomically correct names for body parts, assertiveness skills, the right to privacy, differences in personal touches (the touch continuum), verbalization about unwanted touches, and ways in which a child can know whom to consult when troubled. Letters to parents concerning the curriculum content supplement the discussion. Material on parent-teacher dialogues and meetings includes discussions of child sexual abuse, public laws, classroom policies and strategies, abuse prevention curriculum activities, the parental role in prevention, indicators of abuse, ways to handle a disclosure, and related books and materials. (RH)

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COMPREHENSIVE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION: WORKING WITH STAFF, PARENTS, AND CHILDREN

Presentation at the
Annual Conference of the
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Atlanta, Georgia
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University Child Care is committed to the prevention of child sexual abuse in the center and the community by using the following program components:

PREVENTION: WRITTEN POLICIES
- Mandated reporter status, state laws, procedures for reporting abuse
- Daily classroom practices and procedures

PREVENTION: A PERSONAL SAFETY CURRICULUM
The curriculum includes the following components:
- Anatomically correct names for body parts
- Assertiveness skills
- The right to privacy
- Differences in personal touches
- Verbalizing about unwanted touches
- Knowing who to go to when troubled

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PREVENTION: PARENT/TEACHER DIALOGUES AND MEETINGS
Teachers and administrators discuss the facts about:
- Child sexual abuse
- The center's policies
- Abuse prevention activities with children
- The parent's role in prevention

I. PREVENTION: WRITTEN POLICIES

A. All staff are informed and given copies of laws stating that they are mandated to report suspicion of child abuse. They are given the written reporting procedures of the agency and given training in recognizing symptoms, documenting concerns, and handling a disclosure.

B. Classroom Practices and Strategies: The staff discussed and wrote the following policies for two reasons: to reduce the possibility of abuse occurring within the centers and to reduce the risk of abuse allegations being filed against the staff.

1. Written procedures for toileting and diapering children:
   - Who is authorized to toilet and diaper children?
   - What provision will there be to record a child's abnormal reaction to toileting or diapering?

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- Is the adult who is responsible for toileting visible to another staff member?

2. Written naptime policies:
   - Who will be designated nap monitor (e.g., the person in charge of overseeing naproom protocol?
   - What will be the level of light allowed or required?
   - Are all children and adults visible to the nap monitor?
   - What soothing, caressing touch will be allowed?
   - Will adults be prohibited or allowed to lie down alongside children?
3. Documentation of preschool toileting accidents:
   - Why might this be important?
   - Will parents receive a copy?
4. Systematic observation of children's behavior with objective, written records:
   - What in-service training or supervision will there be to see that ongoing nonjudgmental written observations of behavior occur? (These can be invaluable in assisting in a child abuse investigation and in protecting staff should an allegation be made.)
5. A written discipline plan that specifies a progression of guidance techniques according to developmental levels:
   - What is specified regarding a progression of guidance techniques to handle disruptive children?
6. A written procedure for identifying and documenting concerns regarding children's behavior and/or development:
   - When does a teacher know to discuss a difficult child with a supervisor?
   - What guidelines are there for documentation of critical incidences?
7. Examination of the physical environment for visibility of children and staff at all times, including supervision in bathrooms:
   - In a national study of sexual abuse in day care (Finkelhor, et al, 1988), almost two-thirds of the alleged abuse occurred in bathrooms, places where adults are often alone with one or two children. Written toileting procedures as well as visual access to bathrooms are preventive measures recommended.
8. Expectations that adults are not alone with one or two children except in "emergency" situations:
   - Why should adults not be along with children?
   - Finkelhor, et al (1988) cite naptime and the beginnings and ends of the day as principal times when abuse was alleged to have occurred. During naptime, staff coverage is often low (with principal staff perhaps in meetings and nonteaching staff called in to "cover"), children are sleepy and thus may be more complaisant, and potential witnesses are asleep. At the beginnings and ends of the day, there may be only one adult with one or several children. Thus, supervision is low.
9. Expectations that staff follow professional policies and monitor one another to insure that they do not place themselves or children in "high risk" situations: We have defined the following as "high risk" situations:
   - Taking one child alone to the bathroom
   - Being alone in the building and/or a self-contained classroom with one or two children
   - Helping a preschool child change clothing after a toileting accident out of sight of other adults and children

- Lying down next to a child in the naproom
- Allowing the lighting in the naproom to be dark, thus obscuring visibility of adults and children
- What other situations can you think of that either might be misconstrued by an observer or could potentially allow abuse to occur?

II. PREVENTION: A PERSONAL SAFETY CURRICULUM

A. The basic components of a personal safety curriculum include:

1. Anatomically correct names for body parts
2. Assertiveness skills
3. The right to privacy
4. Differences in personal touches (the touch continuum)
5. Verbalizing about unwanted touches
6. Knowing who to go to when troubled

Teachers review their classroom philosophy and daily practices from the point of view of building personal safety skills. We define program goals (such as building self-esteem, your discipline/problem-solving practices, and the right of children not to participate in a given activity) so that they all reflect meaning from the personal safety perspective. For example, allowing a restless or disruptive child the right to choose "to read" in the quiet corner during circle time supports a developing sense of child autonomy in relationship to adults and groups. Similarly, a discipline policy which encourages problem-solving among preschoolers instead of adult-dictated solutions discourages the view that one always does what adults command. In potential sexual abuse situations, children need to trust their own judgment of their needs, and they need to be able to assertively disagree or refuse to comply with an adult.

Teachers implement elements of a personal safety curriculum tailored to each specific classroom and to the values that emerge in the discussions held with the parents of the children enrolled in that classroom. Send home written updates on activities. Keep the dialogue alive.

B. Personal Safety Curriculum Activities

1. EXPLORING SELF-IMAGE

a. Children looking in the mirror - describing their own faces, drawing their own faces
At this time a parent letter is sent home as follows:

Dear Parents:

As we begin our Personal Safety unit, we will be exploring "Who am I?" and "How have I changed and grown?" Please send in baby pictures of your child (these will be returned) and discuss with your child memories of him/her as a baby. Children will be dictating these "stories" and sharing them.

Further on, we will make family trees as part of our efforts to help children identify their support network. Knowing whom to go to when troubled is an important part of our efforts. Please tell your child about the persons to whom you encourage him/her to go to if troubled.

Sincerely,
Your Child's Teachers

b. Bringing in baby pictures - telling stories about what you could and could not do, then and now
c. Height and weight charts - exploring differences, uniqueness
d. Body questions - guessing how high I can jump, measuring body parts
e. Assembling an "It's My Body" book (handprints and footprints)
f. Filling out a family tree with names of grandparents, siblings, etc. (parent involvement). Knowing your support system.
g. Visiting parents at work (parent involvement)
h. Inviting parents to attend a special "family day" for each child (parent involvement)
i. Body tracings - cardboard body puzzle

2. EXPLORING FEELINGS

The point is to expand the child's vocabulary about feelings beyond happy and sad.

a. Feelings posters - photographs of children with differing expressions. Taking pictures of our children with differing expressions of feelings. Children tell stories about the pictures of their classmates! (What happened, what the child is feeling...).
b. Songs if you are "happy, sad, confused, excited, etc., and you know it."
c. Teacher questions and dialogue with individual children:
   - How do you feel when _____? (involving common situations of disappointment, anger, excitement, surprise, confusion) For example, how do you feel when your best friend has asked you to play and your mother says you have to go to the dentist? Or how do you feel when your best friend says "You're not my friend anymore."
   - Facial Expressions Lotto: Two children's faces have 16 different feeling expressions. Children match and discuss what the expressions mean.

3. CHARTING AND COMPARING FAMILY SAFETY RULES

a. This Unit "nests" personal safety in the overall safety curriculum for young children. The assumption is that children need to know what to do in various unsafe situations including fire, water, cars, streets, and personal touch. Teachers ask children, "What safety rules do you know? What kinds of things do children and adults do to keep children safe?"
b. A letter is sent home to parents asking them to discuss all their safety rules with their child. In this way, we get an idea of how much knowledge is being taught to each child about fire safety, traffic safety, water safety, etc. The child brings in a list from home.

Dear Parents:

As part of our Personal Safety Curriculum, we have been asking children, "What is safety?" and "What are some safety rules?" Some examples of their answers are: "Safety is if you go in your house and get covered up

in your bed." "When you get in your car, you buckle up your seatbelt when Mom is driving fast." "You be careful you don't fall." "It means stay away from guns and ghosts and monsters."

We would like you to talk about some of your safety rules at home, write down your rules, and send them in by Friday. We will then discuss home safety rules and record what the children say after they have talked about safety at home.

In addition, we will be asking if we can visit some parents in their offices on campus. This is an extension of asking families to visit us at school. These will be brief visits, just to see where parents work. Usually we visit for 5-10 minutes.

Thank you for your help in implementing our Personal Safety Curriculum.

Sincerely,
Your Child's Teachers

c. Teachers generate charts with children (all rules accepted). Charts are hung on the wall and discussed.
d. Direct teaching of name, phone number, and street address occurs while constructing a "neighborhood" map. Children bring in pictures of their houses. Fire hydrants, fire stations, and police stations are included on the map. Field trips may be appropriate at this time. Children practice dialing 911 and report their address and phone number on "real" disconnected telephones.
e. Fire safety rules (stop, drop, and roll) and fire drills are practiced.

4. EXPLORING ONE'S PERSONAL SPACE AND PERSONAL TOUCH

Each child has a comfort level of how close other children may come before he or she feels uncomfortable. We set up a "Mother, May I" game for children to explore their individual boundaries.

One child is in the middle of a circle, the teacher picks various children and adults to approach the child, one step at a time, saying, "May I take a step closer?" The child responds "yes" or "no." In this way, the child and the group can experience and become aware of their own (and others') individual differences in letting people physically approach them.

This flows into various individual and small group discussions regarding touches that a child likes and does not like. Common themes are tickling (when it feels good, when it does not feel good), hugging, pushing, hitting, sitting on a lap, being held when you're crying, getting pinched, etc. Teachers introduce the ideas of "safe touch," "unsafe touch."

5. ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS: WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU DON'T LIKE HOW A TOUCH FEELS?

A parent letter is sent home at this time as follows:

Dear Parents:

As part of our Personal Safety Curriculum, we will be working on assertiveness skills. Children need to be able to say "no" to an adult in order to protect themselves in potentially abusive situations. According to Kathy Beland in Talking About Touching, "Molesters often testify to the fact that they would not molest a child who says 'no'" (p. 19).

At school we allow children to refuse to comply with some adult directives. (For example, a child who refuses to use the toilet before nap: We inform the child of the potential consequence - wetting him/herself and needing to clean up and change clothes afterwards. Then we ask them again if they want to use the toilet. A child who refuses will be allowed that decision.)

We would like parents to also determine some situations in which they are willing to let their child make the decision to do it his/her own way or to say "no" and mean it. Some possibilities might include saying "no" to a bath, saying "no" to wearing a particular shirt to school, or saying "no" to a particular food being included in the lunch. Children can be told that sometimes they can have things their own way and other times they need to do what they are told to do. In potential sexual abuse situations, children need to trust their own judgment of their needs, and they need to be able to assertively disagree or refuse to comply with an adult.

Sincerely,
Your Child's Teachers

When It's Clear To You That Something Is Wrong

You have the right to say "no" to touch you don't like. Say "Stop," "I don't like that," "Don't touch me," "I'm going to tell" (a parent, teacher, etc.), "Go away," "No!"

We encourage children with words and practice sessions to say these words assertively.

Tone of voice: Use a grown-up voice; say it like you mean it.
Posture/stance: Look directly at the person, stand up straight.
Facial expression: Look like you mean it (e.g., body language of assertiveness is taught.)

This "teaching" is a fundamental part of the Behavior Management Plan and is actively taught all year as part of our Social Problem-Solving strategy.

When You're Not Sure If Something is Wrong

When you don't like some touch or interaction with a person, tell someone. Individual and small group discussions involve who a child might tell. As appropriate, make the point that the child needs to keep telling until someone listens. Trust your intuition if you do not like a situation.

At this point, several books are available to be read with children: (It's My Body by Lori Freeman, Parenting Press, Inc., 1982; My Body Belongs to Me by Kristin Baird; Talking About Touching for Parents and Kids by Kathy Beland, Committee for Children, Seattle, Washington, and "Split Pea Soup" (story #1) in George and Martha, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA, 1972.

6. SECRETS VS. SURPRISES:

Talk to children about what a surprise is.

a. A surprise is something that you don t tell the person you are surprising until the right time (birthday, Christmas, Hannukah).
b. If an older person asks you to keep a secret and never tell anyone else, then share it; kids don't need to keep secrets for grown-ups.
c. Remember, if you can share it later, it's just a surprise.

Activities:

* Small group discussions of children identifying and sharing surprises that they have kept
* Making presents and giving them
* Puppets and mini-plays help illustrate these themes.

Threats and Secrets:

* If someone says they will hurt you or something terrible will happen if you tell, make sure you tell a grown-up what they said and what they did. A threat is like a secret; kids don't need to keep secrets.

Bribery and Secrets:

* Talk about actual situations and types of bribery that might be used (money, candy, a kitten, a puppy, etc.) to get a child to keep a secret or go somewhere with an adult.
* Safety Rule: You only accept these things from another person after you ask your mother or father if it is all right.

* Small group/circle discussions around "What if.....?" For example, "What would you do if someone offered you five dollars to go to the park with them?"

7. PRIVACY:

This unit takes place in the context of constructing, decorating, and furnishing play houses. In this way, discussions about where one can be private occur in a "hands on" activity. A parent letter is sent home at this time:

Dear Parents:

Another part of our Personal Safety Curriculum involves your child's right to privacy. We would like you to think about and talk to your child about your "knocking rules" at home. Is your child allowed to enter your bedroom or bathroom without knocking? Do you knock before entering your child's room? Can your child shut the door to his/her bedroom or the bathroom to be alone? Are there places in the house where your child can be alone?

Please raise any questions you have that you would like to discuss with us. Much of what we are teaching children depends upon your support and

willingness to talk to your child about these issues.

Sincerely,
Your Child's Teachers

Activities:

* Building houses using cardboard, fabric, wood scraps, wallpaper and paint. During this activity, we discuss "Who is my family" and "Who can I go to if I'm in trouble." Building houses allows the discussion of how to get comfort from adults to occur.
* Woodworking and furniture-building for the houses follows. Individual discussions may occur as incidental teaching about feelings, knowing who to go to when troubled (again), labeling body parts, differences in personal touches. Safety rules: The child is in charge of who touches his/her private parts; child can say no to persons touching his/her private parts except for cleanliness reasons or a doctor's visit. The child needs to go and tell someone if this occurs.
* Read and discuss George and Martha, story #3, "The Tub" by James Marshall (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA, 1972) in small groups.

Questions that may emerge throughout this unit are:

a. What are the "knocking rules" at home?
b. Do kids need to knock before they go into their parents' bedroom?
c. Can children close the door and be alone when they want to use the bathroom?
d. Are friends allowed to violate your rules of privacy?
e. Can children be alone in their bedroom?
f. What places are there in school where kids can be alone?
g. Can kids ask adults to go away and leave them alone?
h. Do adults tune into this "feeling of intrusion" and ask children if they want them to leave? This is a self-evaluative question for teachers.

8. PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Social Skits: The idea is to develop three solutions to any problem. A good reference is Children's Problem-Solving Books: Elizabeth Crary, Parenting Press (7750 31st Avenue, N.E., Seattle, WA, 98115), 1982. The purpose is to empower a child with the feeling that he/she can think of several different solutions to a dilemma. If one doesn't work, try another. In a potential abuse situation, the ability to try different solutions without giving up may be protective for the child.

Small Group Discussions: (Children offer solutions: all responses are accepted.)

a. How do you get a toy if someone else has it and you want it?
   * Ask, "Can I have it?"
   * Ask if you can have it when they are done.
   * Offer them another toy.

* Bring another toy and start playing with the child.

b. If you want to be friends with some children, what can you do?
   * Go say "hello" and ask them to play.
   * Ask them to color with you.
   * Take them by the hand to the book corner and ask an adult to read to you.
   * Take them to blocks and give them a car and some blocks to play with.
   * Ask them to sit with you at lunch.

c. How to handle emergencies:
   * Someone falling out of a tree.
   * A ball rolling out into the road.
   * Someone in a swimming pool who is struggling.

III. PREVENTION: PARENT/TEACHER DIALOGUES AND MEETINGS

Teachers and administrators meet with parents to inform them of the statistics of child sexual abuse, of what they, as parents, can do to prevent the abuse of their child, and of the fact that 85% of child sexual abuse occurs with a known adolescent or adult to whom the parent has entrusted the child's care and friendship. Tell parents that child care workers are mandated reporters under certain state laws. Inform them of the components of a child sexual abuse prevention curriculum for preschoolers. Gain their support (through dialogue and the availability of prevention materials) to begin the implementation of the curriculum at home and at school. Stress the importance of allowing the child to accept and reject "touches" from significant others--especially relatives! Children need to know what to do in a situation of inappropriate touch as much as they need to know what to do when a fire breaks out or when they cross the street.

Encourage parents to make unannounced visits to the center at all times of the day. Stress the partnership of parents and teachers in efforts to protect children.

OUTLINE FOR PARENT/TEACHER PERSONAL SAFETY DISCUSSION

Introductions:

Overview of Child Sexual Abuse

Public Laws Regarding
  Mandated Reporters and the role of The Child
  Protective Service of your state

Classroom Policies and Strategies

Overview of Prevention Curriculum Activities

Parental Role in Prevention (Handout)

Indicators of Abuse/Handling a Disclosure

Open Discussion Questions
  Perusal of Books and Materials

OVERVIEW OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is the exploitation or coercion of a child by an older person (adult or adolescent) for the sexual gratification of the older person. Child sexual abuse involves a continuum of behavior that ranges from verbal, non-physical abuse to violent, forcible touching offenses. It can range from a single encounter with an exhibitionist, to confusing occasional fondling by a casual acquaintance, from years of on-going abuse by a relative or family member to rape and/or exploitation through prostitution and pornography.

The Scope Of The Problem

At least one in four girls and one in ten boys will be sexually abused before reaching the age of 18. The actual incidence is probably much greater, especially for boys. More than one-third of all cases reported involve children 5 years old and younger, with 3 and 11 the most common ages for child sexual abuse to begin.

The sexual abuse of children occurs in every class, race, religion, neighborhood, cultural and ethnic group.

The Dynamics Of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is rarely committed by the "dangerous stranger" that children have traditionally been warned about. In fact, in 80-90% of the reported cases, the offender is someone the child loves and trusts. The offender exploits the child's innocence, dependence, and eventual fear.

Most often, the abuse begins at a very young age with fondling, and is kept secret through bribes, threats and/or special attention. It continues for a number of years, often eventually escalating to penetration and/or oral-genital contact.

Why Don't Children Tell?

Young children do not tell for two reasons: at the early stages, they may simply be unaware that the touching is inappropriate. Later they are bribed and/or coerced into keeping the secret by threats of frightening consequences to themselves or their families if they tell.

Children are often made to feel responsible both for the abuse and for the consequences to their family if they should tell. Finally, children may not tell because they do not know how to tell—or whom to tell.

Consequences Of Child Sexual Abuse

Early sexual victimization can result in life long problems. The degree of trauma depends on the age and personality of the child, the nature of the relationship between the child and the offender, the nature and duration of the abuse, and the way disclosure is handled.

Prostitution, delinquency, self destructive patterns, suicide or suicide attempts, depression, sexual fears and dysfunction, and lowered self-esteem are often associated with early and long term abuse.

A pattern of victimization can continue into future generations. Women abused as children often marry men who will abuse their children. Men abused as children may continue the cycle of victimization as abusers.

p. 1, Beland, Kathy.
Talking About Touching II:
Personal Safety for Preschoolers.
Committee for Children,
Seattle, WA 98122

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PARENTAL ROLE IN PREVENTION
OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Parental Awareness: Parents who are knowledgeable and aware of the reality of child sexual abuse create an invisible safety net for children. You are more likely to be alert to signs of distress in your child, to ask questions, and to really listen to the response.

Parental Screening: Parents can take protective steps to screen anyone with whom they leave their child in care.

* Ask for and check references for all babysitters.
* Tell your babysitters (even if they are family relatives) what your family safety rules are.
* Tell a new babysitter you will call home at the child's bedtime to check on things.
  Do not tell your child to "be good and do everything the sitter tells you to do."
* Ask your child how he/she likes each babysitter. Dismiss sitters with whom your child is uncomfortable.
* Check that your child's day care has an open door policy for visiting. Make a surprise visit!

Parenting and Basic Prevention: Parents can work basic prevention ideas into their parenting.

* Respect your child's assertiveness. Plan for appropriate times when your child can say "no" to a request of yours.
* In terms of building self-esteem, plan for some areas in which the child is allowed to make decisions e.g. (what clothes to wear, what book to read...).
* Be aware of the changing needs for privacy as your child grows older. What are the boundaries of privacy in your home - rules about bathrooms, knocking on closed doors, etc.? Do they hold for both grown-ups and children?
* Really listen to your child's discomforts. Validate his/her feelings or fears regarding people, nightmares, etc. In this way, you are building up a supportive family atmosphere which will encourage your child to tell, if abuse occurs.
* Respect your child's feelings not to kiss Aunt or Grampa at the next family gathering. In this way, you validate the child's right to share or not to share his/her body in personal touch with another. Young children can learn to "blow a kiss" rather than be constrained to be hugged or kissed against their wishes. Encourage and accept your child's assertiveness regarding touches that he/she likes and does not like.

Teaching Assertiveness Skills: We teach the children to be verbally assertive in their classrooms regarding touches they don't like.

* We encourage children to say:
  - "Stop!"
  - "Don't touch me; I don't like that!
* We encourage children to say it like they mean it:
  - looking directly at the other person's face
  - looking like they mean it (no giggling or smiling)
  - using a serious and assertive tone of voice

In an unsafe personal touch situation, a child s ability to assertively say "no" to an adult may be the only protection a child has.

Understanding the Touch Continuum We encourage you to be aware of the Touch Continuum as diagrammed below:

With nurturing touch, the needs of the child for comfort, warmth, and reassurance are being met by the adult.

In exploitive touch, the needs of the adult are being met. In many clinical cases, the child can pinpoint the day and time he/she began to "feel funny" or "not like to be near" the person. This feeling occurred long before any sexual touching began. One can encourage children to trust their intuition and to pay attention when they "feel funny" or have the "uh-oh" feeling. If we encourage children to tell us when they feel this way (and respect their right not to be hugged or kissed), we have a chance of preventing a molesting relationship from developing.

Secrets vs. Surprises: Within the family structure, you can take some important preventive measures.

- Distinguish between surprises and secrets:
  - A surprise is a secret that gets told in a little while and makes someone very happy.
  - A secret is often asked by an adult to be kept and never told. Adults sometimes threaten or bribe children to keep secrets.
- Consider adopting a "no secrets" rule and let your children know that you want them to come and tell you about any secret an adult has asked them to keep. (Even if a mistake is made and a surprise birthday present or party is given away, you have erred on the side of personal safety.)

Teaching Independence in Toileting and Bathing: Another prevention precaution is to teach your child to be independent in toileting (around three years of age) and to be independent in bathing (e.g., cleaning their genitals themselves). In this way, you can tell caregivers and babysitters that your child does not need help with these tasks.

Safety Rules Regarding Adults: Discuss simple rules regarding requests or gifts from grown-ups. Children should get your permission first.

- Some situations include those when an adult asks a child:
  - to help find a lost puppy or kitten
  - to accept a gift without the parents' knowledge
  - to accept a ride
  - to show the adult how to find a nearby place

Children need to have guidance in how to respond in ambiguous or potentially unsafe personal situations. The reason we do not suggest that you stress "stranger danger" information is that the majority of child molestation occurs with a person who is well-known to the child and to whom the parent has entrusted the child s care and/or friendship.

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